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**Abstract Title:**

How innovation platforms can facilitate sustainable intensification? Insights from multi-level systems research in West-Africa.

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**Key words:** sustainable intensification, innovation processes, innovation platform functions, change management, research challenge, west-Africa

**Abstract Text**

As new instruments for agricultural policies, innovation platforms (IP) are experienced for over a decade. They reflect the evolutions in frameworks for thinking the drivers of agricultural development. Notably, researchers are supposed to become actors among others and no more be the only ones to produce useful knowledge. In West Africa, IPs are mainly promoted in two forms: “value chains approach-based” IP that aim at improving productivity, competitiveness and markets, and “agricultural research-oriented” IP that aim at designing and transferring new agricultural practices. In both cases, researchers still face many demands for designing, implementing or facilitating IPs.

In order to explore the pertinence of these instruments as regards sustainable intensification processes (SI) in west-African savannah, the ASAP research platform gathering five national and international research centers (IER, IDR, CIRAD, CIRDES, INERA) organized a seminar in Bobo-Dioulasso in 2013. The objectives were to take stock of i) systems research results on innovation processes that contribute to SI, ii) lessons from the experimentations of IPs set up in different countries (Burkina, Mali, Niger, Senegal). Then we explored the possible functions of IPs in SI processes and we examined implications for researchers to achieve the high expectations that are being laid at their door.

Two main functions have been identified, according to the nature of innovations and the step of SI process itself: 1) either SI is breaking with the dominant agricultural model. IP functions are threefold: give sense to SI; create multi-actor partnerships based on long-term commitment to change and a way to collectively go-on through adaptive management; facilitate farmer-led innovation processes. 2) Or SI is in continuity with dominant agricultural dynamics. IP mainly aims at accelerating innovation processes through the facilitation of informal multi-actor arrangements and of knowledge exchanges between converging local innovation systems.

We showed how the diversity of systems research methods produced by ASAP research platform enables to produce useful tools and knowledge to help the implementation of these different IPs. However we also highlighted a number of areas for future research and capacity building issues for researchers if they are to play their part to the full.